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ABSTRACT

When the centrist government of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac chose 69-year-old Robert Hersant to buy the newspaper "France-Soir" (famous for its ties to the resistance to the Nazis) in 1976, journalists at many newspapers on the left fought the political move by reminding both the public and the government of Hersant's collaboration during the German occupation of France and of the unfulfilled liberation press law. Hersant considers his collaboration to be a passage of youth. Hersant's political and publishing successes and the fact that the collaboration charge was 30 years old muted the issue for the reading public. Newspapers were struggling in 1976--they were losing readers in increasing numbers and had little money to invest in new print technology. Hersant represented a past they could not condone and a future (reducing personnel, investing in modern centralized printing facilities, and organizing central editorial bureaus) that concerned them. Hersant's purchase of two Paris newspapers in 1976 marked a turning point. Hersant, at one time stripped of his right to vote because he collaborated with the Nazis, had by 1976 become an important member of France's conservative political forces and one of its most influential citizens. (Thirty-six notes are included and three illustrations are attached.) (RS)

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CITIZEN HERSANT:

THE RISE TO POWER OF A CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PRESS LORD

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CITIZEN HERSANT:

THE RISE TO POWER OF A CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PRESS LORD

French journalists have called Robert Hersant "Citizen Hersant," and the reference to the "Citizen Kane" portrait of William Randolph Hearst probably pleases France's premiere press owner. Hersant told one reporter that "when I was 17, my friends imagined I would become the editor-in-chief of the Rouen journal and a member of the French parliament. That amused me, because I thought I would rather become Hearst or Léon Blum."[1]

At sixty-nine Hersant has created a press empire that many French intellectuals, journalists and politicians of the left consider dangerous. The Hersant Group owns more newspapers than any other corporation in France. Hersant owns sixteen of the country's eighty-seven dailies, including two of the eleven Paris daily papers, numbers which translate to twenty-two percent of the print run of provincial newspapers and thirty-four percent of the Parisian papers.[2] In a nation of fifty-two million people, one-fifth of the thirty million citizens who buy newspapers read a Hersant paper.

Hersant also owns fourteen magazine and technical publications, thirty local radio stations, half interest in Channel Five (one of the six national television stations), controlling interest in a group of regional dailies, a news service, a publicity agency, a national printing and facsimile transmission network, and three daily newspapers in Belgium. In 1987 the Hersant group had an income of $1.1 billion and employed over

10,000 people.[3]

This empire particularly offends intellectuals and journalists on the left because Hersant, who was convicted of collaboration during the German occupation in World War II, built it on newspaper acquisitions. Newspapers had been seized after the war from all publishers deemed collaborators and redistributed to operators of clandestine presses or journalists active in the Resistance, most of whom came from the left and had been members of the Christian democrat, socialist or communist parties.

Seizing presses also consolidated the power of General Charles de Gaulle's provisional government by taking newspapers away from potential detractors. This conjunction of post-war idealism and political pragmatism produced the ordinance of August 26, 1944, and a more punitive law of May 11, 1946, which, in addition to creating a licensing board to prevent collaborators from practicing journalism, also declared that no individual could own more than one newspaper.[4]

Press redistribution created a brief golden age of journalism: Parisians had 28 dailies to choose from and provincial citizens had 175 dailies. Over half of them disappeared within a decade, and the press law which conceived them remained unenforced, a reminder of a remarkable moment.

The political commitment and diversity which created these papers still animates the French newspaper world, especially the Parisian corner of it. Eleven Parisian newspapers serve audiences who have a specific political viewpoint; some are party organs and

others papers of the extreme left. In 1976, for example, there were four daily leftist newspapers published in Paris. Even the principal Parisian dailies, such as Le Monde and France-Soir, have a definite political cast.[3]

A rich literary tradition blends with the political nature of the press, and writers such as Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Emile Zola contributed to the literary importance of the press as founders of newspapers, as editors and as writers. With such political and literary forebears, French journalists view their role seriously; they tend to be politically engaged and editorially eloquent, to interpret issues as well as to report them.

Hersant acts in this social, political, and intellectual context. This paper looks at Hersant against the backdrop of occupied France and the years after the liberation to see how he began a career which became controversial. It will follow him from 1940, when he first began to seek work in journalism to 1952, when he was finally on firm footing. It will look at Hersant again in his prime when controversy about him peaked and a journalists' strike followed his purchase of France-Soir in August 1976. Le Monde, France's paper of record, provides daily coverage of the strike. Le Monde's editorials and its sampling of other papers' editorials will give us a view of press opinion on Hersant. This paper will examine the social, political, and intellectual context of the time to see how this became a turning point for the press. Within the same context, it will examine how Hersant -- whose collaboration was an issue -- achieved power, if not legitimacy,

how he capped his print empire and entered the inner circle of France's first citizens.

THE OCCUPATION AND LIBERATION YEARS

Robert Hersant was twenty years old in June 1940 when German troops seized Rouen, his hometown. Hersant and his lycee classmates briefly became members of the Senegalese Infantry First Regiment as the French Army scrambled for reinforcements after devastating losses at Dunkerque. Paris fell on June 14, and demobilization six weeks later dropped the students into the limbo of occupied France.

Hersant had come of age at the moment his country collapsed. Still weary and financially drained by World War I, France had entered war again with a weak government which its citizens distrusted. French citizens, especially the shopkeepers and working people, had paid a high price in the last war, and many were unwilling to do it again. When German troops threatened towns, civilians in many areas actually prevented French soldiers from fighting in order to preserve their homes and shops. In one city, Poitiers, the mayor surrendered the town before the astounded troops preparing to defend it could fire a shot, and citizens threatened to destroy the soldiers' barricades.[6] The incident dramatized the confusion and the fear of further loss which paralyzed the French.

It was an inauspicious moment to start one's adult life, and, if one could not change the times, one could at least choose a different place. Robert Hersant chose Paris, which lies sixty-five

miles southeast of Rouen.

He sought work first with La Gerbe, a popular literary and political weekly paper started at the request of Paul Jospeh Goebbel, Hitler's propaganda minister. Marc Augier, his interviewer, recalls Hersant as an ambitious young man, tall, brunet and with a direct, blue-eyed gaze, who said he would like one day to be a great newspaper owner.[7]

Young Hersant had some experience writing a weekly report for a local paper, L'Eveil Normand -- although he probably did not tell Augier that readers' complaints about his extreme socialist views had prompted his dismissal. He also had launched Rouen Cocktail, an apolitical paper showcasing poems by his classmates, and a poem by him appearing under the pseudonymn Robert Nantes; the one-page paper had only one edition.[8]

Rejected by La Gerbe, Hersant found a position in August with the Young Front, a branch of the French Guard and the French National Collectivist Party. With two other young men, he organized the Nazi youth group's propaganda center. Under Nazi propaganda staff instruction, they seized offices for the center and an apartment at 28 avenue des Champs-Elysées, evicting a Jewish family who lived there. The three quickly produced the first issue of Le Pilori, an anti-Jewish and anti-Mason weekly paper. The young editors' names appeared several times in the issue, listed as speakers at the center's inauguration and as leaders of the newly formed youth group.[9]

Hersant left the publication after less than a month when

Paris police, responding to two complaints by Jewish merchants, opened an investigation against him of extortion charges. He left Paris and in 1942 worked again for a government youth group, this time for the Vichy government as director of the Maréchal Pétain youth center in Brévannes. Awarded a government grant, Hersant opened and organized the center, and he also started a Pétainist paper, Jeunes Forces, which reflected the pro-fascist philosophy of France's aging military hero and figurehead president.

In June 1943 Hersant left his second official post when he was convicted on charges of ration violation for selling the center's surplus jam on the black market. Sent to a jail in Rouen, he was released a month later. He operated a small general store near Rouen following his release, and then organized a tire recycling business and finally a driver education school. Married in 1940, Hersant had two sons now and worked to keep his family going.

Meanwhile troops moved across France again, starting with the bloody Allied landing on the Normandy beaches in June 1944. The Germans capitulated in Paris on August 25, and France was free.

A year after the liberation, 25-year-old Hersant sought a new role in civic life and ran for city office in the Montmartre district of Paris. He received 2,551 votes out of some 200,000 cast, plus a summons to trial. Running for office had brought him to official attention, and on June 5, 1945, Hersant was convicted of collaboration. Imprisoned for a month, he was released in mid-July but still carried a condemnation of ten years of "national indignity."

The condemnation stripped Hersant of the right to vote, to own a business, and to be a journalist. Hersant, who had established a company just before his collaboration charge, used his organizational skills to bypass the prohibition on owning a business; he created the company anew, changing the name of the small catalog publishing firm from General International Publicity (IGP) to General International Press, and making his brother, Patrick, and a friend, Jean-Marie Balestre, the directors. The firm also administered a magazine -- L'Auto-Journal, founded in January 1950 -- that was to finance the first acquisitions of the Hersant empire. In November 1951 IGP collapsed under faltering finances that ultimately brought Hersant a fraud conviction and fifteen-day jail sentence. His auto magazine, however, met immediate success in car-hungry France, and Hersant created another company in September 1951 to administer it.

L'Auto-Journal became the car buyer's consumer advocate, publishing secret plans of car designs and angering manufacturers. Speculation arose on the source of funds Hersant used to start the magazine. He says the printer who ran the first issue extended credit; others suggest that funds came from subscriptions that French hotel owners paid for a tourism annual Hersant promoted in 1949 but never published.

Hersant's fortunes turned because of the profits of L'Auto-Journal and an amnesty granted in 1952 from the national indignity charge. He could now vote, run for office, direct a business, and own a newspaper. In that year Hersant bought a weekly paper

founded in the months after the liberation and eventually transformed it into a daily, Oise-Matin. The paper provided him with a base for his first successful political campaign and a pattern for later purchases. Hersant was off and running.

VICTORY FOR CITIZEN HERSANT

By 1976 Hersant's political success included twelve years in mayoral offices and twenty-two years in the Chamber of Deputies, the French parliament. He was completing the construction of six regional printing centers and a facsimile transmission network. He also had just capped his empire of provincial newsapers with the acquisition of Le Figaro, the most influential conservative newspaper in Paris, and consequently, in France.

On August 11, 1976, the trade publication Correspondance de la presse reported that Hersant was about to sign a partnership agreement with Paul Winkler who had just bought the Paris daily France-Soir from Hachette, the French multinational publishing firm, in July.[10] Once the most widely read paper in France, France-Soir had fallen from 1.1 million copies sold daily in 1968 to 600,000 in 1976.[11] When Winkler, the head of the press agency Opera Mundi and an associate of Hachette, bought the ailing paper, some had wondered how the seventy-eight-year-old buyer had persuaded banks to loan him money for the purchase.

The report that Hersant would become a fifty-percent partner in the afternoon daily had a certain financial logic, but it upset France-Soir journalists. After Hersant bought Le Figaro in 1975,

fifty-five percent of the journalists -- 160 out of 293 -- on the staff at Le Figaro had resigned and another 30 had been fired.[12] Hersant was making liberal use of a special law, the "conscience clause," to change the personnel of France's oldest newspaper.[13] Dating from 1939, the law gives reporters the right to resign, with severance pay based on length of employment, when they cannot philosophically support a change in the character or orientation of a publication. By law reporters can exercise this conscience clause only in the first three months following a change in ownership. Hersant still offered the option to journalists at Le Figaro a year later.

Journalists at France-Soir were well aware that the new owner, who had promised not to intrude in the editorial business of the paper, had been involved in editorial policy at Le Figaro in March 1976, when he wrote an article condemning Eurocommunism and had it published. Written in response to a piece by Le Figaro's political editor, the Hersant article was fought by even the more conservative administrators of the paper.

The paper had just made a sharp right turn, and the newly created weekly supplement, Figaro-Magazine, indicated a still more conservative direction. A champion of nineteenth century laissez faire capitalism, it attacked socialist and communist party leaders and policies.[14]

France-Soir personnel also feared Hersant's plans to integrate the paper's production with that of Le Figaro. According to the Correspondance de la presse report, the purchase facilitated

reorganizing the printing of the two dailies -- one was printed at night and the other during the day -- as well as transmission of pages by facsimile to the Hersant provincial press network.

Propelled by these concerns, a delegation of France-Soir journalists met with Paul Winkler on Thursday, August 12, and asked that he consider other buyers for the paper. Winkler promised to wait five days, but he noted that his negotiations with Hersant were at a very advanced stage. The journalists countered by voting to strike until they were assured that negotiations with Hersant were suspended and that other buyers were being considered.

By Sunday, August 15, the Parisian press, with the exception of Le Figaro, had begun extensive coverage of the events at France-Soir. Le Monde described the state of negotiations and gave editorial support on page one as well as an inside page. In an editorial lamenting "The press sold, the press soiled," Le Monde writer Jacques Sauvageot observed that Winkler's purchase had sprung from a true passion for the press whereas Hersant's came from a desire to build a press monopoly. Sauvageot pointed out that Hersant clearly violated the French press law's ordinance of August 26, 1944, forbidding one person to own more than one daily paper.[15] Rouge, the communist league newspaper, raised the question of Hersant's source of funds. L'Humanité, the French communist party paper, observed that France's largest banks stood behind Hersant and had lent him over $5.5 million by February 1976. Le Quotidien de Paris warned that "the plurality of the press will disappear ....Millions of readers will receive information through

a single prism, and the expression of diverse opinion in the country will become a thing of theory."[16]

Le Monde's Sauvageot also remarked on the interesting timing of the sale announcement. Most French citizens have a one-month vacation beginning in August; by August 15, Parisians have largely deserted the city, leaving it to the tourists. The report of Hersant's sale came just before the August 15 weekend.

Hersant met with Winkler on Tuesday, August 17, and signed an agreement making him a fifty-percent partner in France-Soir's new corporate owner, Presse Alliance. France-Soir journalists, frustrated after a meeting with Winkler the day before, had taken another strike vote and decided -- 101 for the strike, 38 against, and 3 abstaining -- not to publish. They also appealed to French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing to intervene and to stop the sale to Hersant. Requesting a meeting with the president, they sought his support in fighting what they saw as a severe blow to freedom of the press, an issue Giscard had recently embraced.[17]

While the journalists awaited Giscard's response, Hersant met with a close associate of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac at the Hôtel Matignon ministry. He also had a "communication" printed on the front page of Le Figaro, and released the statement to the press, giving his view on the France-Soir purchase. He compared himself to a technical expert called in when a disaster occurs, such as an oil well fire. Hersant wrote that "some great minds have protested that this stock purchase menaces the diversity of the press. It is time to stop such self-serving hypocrisy. The

only regions where pluralism persists are those where I publish a daily."[18]

Writers reacted strongly to Hersant's words. On Thursday, August 19, Le Monde, now in its third day of front-page coverage of the story, led with a page one story and editorial and placed Hersant's commentary on a page dealing exclusively with the France-Soir events. The page one editorial argued that treating newspapers and journalists as merchandise endangered democracy. Editorialist Pierre Viansson-Ponté said that writers bring to their craft more than simply labor; they offer their imaginations, their honor, and sometimes their lives. He recalled the post-war idealism that had changed the press and that was reflected in one Parisian daily's motto, "From the Resistance to the Revolution." He coupled the reference to France-Soir's resistance beginnings with an appeal for enforcing the anti-monopoly press law of August 26, 1944. Ironically, the law was approaching its anniversary in the coming week, and 32 years after its creation it still lacked enforcing legislation.

That such legislation might be forthcoming was not an idealist's dream. Legislative elections loomed on the political horizon, and for the first time since the war, the parties on the left appeared united and broadly supported. Journalists speculated that the threat of the united left had prompted Giscard's centrist party government to help Hersant acquire both Le Figaro and France-Soir, an arrangement which kept the conservative papers in a politically safe camp.

The government's role in the first purchase was already known. As L'Humanité observed, "Mr. Chirac served as intermediary and Mr. Giscard d'Estaing personally took part in the composition of the paper's administration. Can one really believe the case might be any different with France-Soir?"[19]

Political speculation began to rise, and a new prospect developed when other potential buyers stepped forward, hoping to make Winkler rescind his agreement with Hersant. Claude Perdriel, president and general director of Nouvel Observateur, a socialist news magazine, and Jean-Marc Smadja, nephew of the former director of Combat, a famous liberation-era daily founded by Albert Camus, both announced interest in becoming a partner in the newspaper. Perdriel made his offer first to France-Soir journalists rather than Winkler; both his offer and Smadja's were declined by Winkler, who said his agreement with Hersant was firm.

Negotiations with management stood at a stalemate, but the paper's staff received expressions of solidarity from journalists across France and especially in Paris. The national journalists union (Syndicat national des journalists: SNJ) met with France-Soir writers on August 20, and offered to work with them in opposing "this vulgar power ploy intended to further corral the press before the elections [to be called in the fall or the spring by the president]."[20]

Hersant's comments also strengthened the writers' resolve to continue the strike. Calling his words insulting, they voted to extend the strike another forty-eight hours. In an August 20

editorial entitled "Backfire," Le Monde's Viansson-Ponté observed that Hersant's commentary showed "in a blinding light, the methods and goals of France-Soir's new co-owner. Mr. Hersant introduces himself for exactly what he is: the fireman one calls 'when an oil well burns' to create the backfire."[21]

Hersant's comments were printed again that day as the focus of a page Le Monde dedicated to the France-Soir affair. Le Monde again urged enforcement of the anti-monopoly press law. A commentator on one of the government-controlled television stations, Antenne 2, said the Hersant purchase contributed to a growing concern over "slipping toward a kind of dictatorship on opinion."[22]

Important support for the journalists came from France's largest union, the Confédération général du travail (CGT), and from its affiliate, the printers union, both linked with the Communist Party. The CGT called for the creation of an investigative commission to determine the origin of Hersant's funds which permitted him to purchase two major newspapers since January 1, 1975.

On Saturday, August 21, the journalists union joined with France-Soir journalists to act on this suggestion. They petitioned the Paris civil court for a court-appointed administrator to investigate and report to them on both the stock purchase funding and the possibility of infractions of the 1944 press ordinance prohibiting multiple ownership by one person.

All of the unions supporting the strike movement called for

a general strike and demonstration of solidarity on Thursday, August 26, the anniversary of the ordinance.

Four days of striking had effected Winkler. He entered a meeting of striking staffers[23] and told them that losses amounted to $55,000 a day. Before the strike the paper had been operating at a growing annual deficit of about $10,000,000.[24] Winkler underscored the fact that the losses from the strike weighed more heavily on him than on Hersant and that he would be forced to sell his shares to his co-owner if the strike continued much longer. He assured staffers that he would offer a guarantee of independence to the editorial side of the paper.

Hersant had already moved on another front -- at the same meeting members of the printers union reported he intended to put out the newspaper using personnel and printing facilities at Le Figaro. Hersant had met with France-Soir printers and appeared to have swayed their opinions. CGT members told the journalists that they believed the editorial staff's decision to prolong the strike might ultimately jeopardize jobs. They urged returning to work.

By Monday, August 23, the CGT members had decided they could no longer support "a movement which risks becoming suicidal."[25] In their view, workers won nothing from trying to determine who was going to be their boss; whoever he was, he would still be the boss. In the union's communist philosophy, management was always the enemy, and the union's purpose was to protect the workers and their jobs. The printers union members also had had longer to mull over Hersant as a prospective boss than their editorial colleagues. On

August 6, Hersant had told CGT leaders that he would soon be the owner of France-Soir; printers union members had kept silent and had not revealed the advance notice they had received.[26] Even though the printers union had left the strike movement, CGT members said they would not work on any "pirate" publication of France-Soir that Hersant might try to publish.

Losing this crucial strike support weakened the journalists' position considerably. They could still continue the offensive on the moral front, however. In the Tuesday, August 24, edition of Le Monde Philippe Viannay, founder of La Defense de la France, the resistance newspaper which became France-Soir, contributed an editorial entitled "History Repeats Itself." Viannay reminded readers that several people had laid down their lives for La Defense de la France, defending freedom of speech during the German occupation. France-Soir journalists were defending that freedom, too, and Viannay noted that their opponent was a man "whose past is so different from mine."[27] He observed that the writers' determination was fueled by their deep indignation. "They do not want to be sold like furniture, nor directed by a group tied to the [center of] power, nor dependent on one whom they cannot abide for his urge to exercise power or for his contempt of people." Viannay applauded the writers for returning to the newspaper's Resistance roots by invoking the ordinance of August 26, 1944.[28]

Journalists at France-Soir, awaiting the court decision, returned to work and published an edition on August 24. It included front-page coverage of the strike and an explanation to

the paper's readers of what was at stake. The editors echoed Viannay: "For 35 years, certain of us, notably in publishing La Defense de la France under the occupation, have fought to be free men. Today we are fighting to be free journalists....It is never too late to stand up against a power [trying to control] information."[29]

Editorial action was all that was occurring at this moment as the man at the center of power, Giscard, declined to receive a delegation of France-Soir journalists until the court announced its decision. Smadja, still hoping to become a partner in the paper, met with Winkler and reported that the interview was "not negative."

More information emerged on the political front as L'Express, directed by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber -- who had been rejected as a buyer of Le Figaro the year before -- revealed that Hersant's purchases of both papers occurred because of prime minister Chirac's support and intervention with the banks. Both operations, the news magazine reported, had been directed by Chirac's assistant, Marie-France Garaud. Nouvel Observateur speculated that the political maneuver started higher up. "Hersant would be nothing if doors closed before him....If one investigated the network of complicity of Hersant, it would cover the body of the state -- and the nation -- up to its head."[30]

As the political front heated up, the France-Soir staff voted by a narrow margin of fifty-one percent to resume striking for another forty-eight hours starting Wednesday, August 25. Strikers

called for fellow journalists and supporters to join them Thursday, August 26, for the scheduled general strike and a demonstration.

On Tuesday the court announced it would hand down its decision on Saturday, August 28. Le Monde reported that Hersant's lawyers argued before the court the journalists were not stockholders and therefore had no legal right to information on the stock sale. They also claimed that the paper's journalists were already protected by the conscience clause which served as a base for the press law of 1944. As for the journalists' union, Hersant's counselors maintained that they were a third party with no legal standing in the case.

The journalists took their case to the streets Thursday, in a demonstration and observation of the press law's anniversary. At 11 A.M. over a thousand journalists assembled before the stock exchange on rue Réaumur, gathered behind union banners and marched five blocks down the street to the France-Soir offices. They carried placards that read "Hersant collabo..." and "Demantle Hersant." There also were cries of "Hersant - Nazi!" Publications in Paris as well as many scattered across France shut down in one-day sympathy strikes. Wire services in Paris, including Associated Press and Reuter, stopped transmitting for twelve hours.[3]

At 11:30 A.M. that same day Prime Minister Jacques Chirac made a surprise declaration on national broadcast media: He had resigned his position because he felt he did not have the means he deemed necessary to function efficiently as prime minister. President Giscard, who had cut short a vacation in Africa because of several

domestic crises, accepted Chirac's resignation and appointed a new prime minister, Raymond Barre. Giscard's reaction to Chirac's statement was that the prime minister had tried to usurp presidential power.

The change in government dominated the news. Le Monde's coverage of the France-Soir controversy dropped to the "Press" column on page 10 Thursday where readers found a description of the "day of solidarity." There was also a release from the national journalists union and unions supporting the strike; it reminded readers of their freedom-fighting forebears.

On Saturday the Paris court handed down a divided decision. The court declared the France-Soir journalists an inadmissible party for a suit because they were not shareholders in the company. The journalists union could have no part in the suit since it was not a legal corporate entitity. Even so, the court found cause to investigate the source of funds for Hersant's purchase of stock and the financial situation of the newspaper. An expert consultant was appointed and commissioned to report his findings to a Paris commercial court within two months.

Le Monde reported a bomb scare at Le Figaro that Saturday. A telephone call from the "Press Liberation Front" had prompted evacuation of the building. The August journalists strike ended on this note. By the time Parisians had returned from their vacations in September, the big news was the newly formed government under Barre. In the next few months Parisians would read of Hersant's new editorial appointments at France-Soir and his

purchase of Winkler's stock.

THE POLITICAL BACKDROP

Hersant had accomplished his most expensive newspaper purchase to date, and he had done it with the aid of the second most powerful office holder in France, Prime Minister Chirac. That purchase probably played a role in Chirac's resignation. Chirac had been assigned to consolidate political support for the president against the newly united left, and he decided to prevent France-Soir from falling into the hands of a buyer from the left. Sources say he arranged purchase of France-Soir at a private dinner early in July where Chirac and his assistant, Garaud, persuaded Hersant to buy into the ailing paper. They assured him that government intercession with private banks would provide the $10 million needed for the purchase. President Giscard apparently was not aware of Chirac's precise intentions at the time of the dinner meeting, and subsequent events indicate that he felt Chirac overstepped his power.[12]

Garaud offered another view. She said the government had provided more support to Winkler, who first bought the paper from Hachette. A third party of stockholders, from the steel industry, controlled thirty-five percent of Winkler's stock, an arrangement intended to provide Winkler the financial backing needed for the purchase and to make his position in the company more solid than that of Hersant, who was dependent on bank loans. According to Garaud, three months after Chirac left office, the group sold their shares to Hersant. Garaud felt betrayed by the sale.[13]

Even if Hersant owned more of France-Soir than Chirac's plans intended, his ownership still meant that the big working class daily was in the hands of a political conservative. Thus, Giscard faced legislative elections with Hersant's papers supporting the president's centrist positions. He would soon receive Hersant at the Elysée palace, and Prime Minister Barre would support him in a political race. Chirac, the head of his political party, gave a pragmatic assessment of Hersant's value: "Between a candidate whom I appreciate and like and a man who, through his newspapers, supports more than thirty of our candidates, I have to make a responsible choice."[14]

CONCLUSION

When the centrist government, through Chirac's intervention, chose Hersant to buy France-Soir, journalists at Le Monde and other journals on the left fought the political move by reminding both the public and the government of Hersant's collaboration and of the unfulfilled liberation press law.

Hersant's past had been an issue before this sale, but the collaboration charge was over 30 years old. Time, coupled with Hersant's political and publishing success, probably muted the charges for the reading public, even though the issue struck powerful chords among people with ties to the resistance.

Such charges must be set in the context of the occupation. Hersant's generation is aware that among the country's 40 million citizens in World War II resistance activity was limited to about 30,000 people. Hersant views the collaboration experience as a

passage of youth. Reflecting on his early years, he says, "I do not deny this rather passionate phase of my life. Not only do I not deny it, but I am happy to have lived it. It was an enriching experience...and it even had a positive effect on my life."[7] His urge to succeed may have been deepened by the problems that grew out of his early years. Hersant does not elaborate.

Those years had been very important for the journalists who founded newspapers of that period, and the press law enacted in the days following the liberation led many to hope that a new era was born. Many newspapers disappeared from 1944 to 1976, but the acquisition of Franc-Soir, symbolic for its resistance ties, underscored the failure of the press law and the fragility of the newspaper world.

The unsuccessful editorial appeals to the government about enforcing the press law showed that the issue had little future under the centrist government. Furthermore, Chirac's departure from government did not change the status of the France-Soir purchase. Paris courts found nothing irregular in Hersant's loans, and Giscard did not intervene in the affair. The law of August 26, 1944, had never had enforcing legislation and under the current government showed no prospect of it over a generation later.

The newspaper world of France had reached a significant moment. Although still important for their power to reach voters, newspapers were now struggling enterprises. Most French newspapers, particularly in Paris, had been losing readers since 1968, and between 1975 and 1976 the losses had accelerated.[8] Few

had the money to invest in the new printing technology, especially in Paris where higher personnel costs limited budgets. Hersant had built his provincial press empire by reducing personnel, investing in modern centralized printing facilities and organizing central editorial bureaus. He not only represented a past journalists could not condone, but he probably also indicated a future that concerned them. Their world had changed, and Hersant was an agent of that change.

Hersant moved with confidence in this world, and his print empire was now able to grow in a political climate where he thrived. For Hersant and for the French press, August 1976 marked a turning point. With the acquisition of the two Paris newspapers, Hersant became an important member of France's conservative political forces. Chirac's maneuvering drew him into the center of power at a moment when the centrist party sought to reinforce its strength. A man who had once been stripped of his right to vote, Hersant had become one of his country's most influential citizens.

NOTES

1. Bernard Lalanne, "Hersant, ou la volonté de puissance," L'Expansion, April 6, 1984, p. 130. Léon Blum was a socialist party leader, a writer and intellectual, who headed the French government in 1938 when Hitler invaded Austria.

2. Claude-Jean Bertrand, "A Critique of the French Media," The Media Reporter, Summer 1985, p. 38; Evelyne Ducarroir, "Diffusion de la Presse française 1984-1987 (OJD)," Mediaspouvoirs 12 (October - December 1988): 181; Pierre Albert, La Presse, 8th ed., rev. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 93.

3. Le Nouvel Observateur, December 8-14, 1988, p. 13. SOCPRESSE, the Hersant Group's principal corporate unit, had an income of 7 billion francs in 1987. Encyclopédie Quid: 1988, (Paris: Editions Laffont), p. 1078. The most recent figures available in Quid list 10,000 full-time employees as of 1982.

4. Michel Mathien, La Presse quotidienne régionale, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), p. 8. These laws further punished publishers deemed collaborationist by condemning "convicted" newspaper names to death. For example, the newspaper title Le Temps in Paris cannot be used again by any paper.

5. Le Monde is center left and supports a Socialist Party position; France-Soir, nominally apolitical in 1976, held a centrist, pro-Giscard (progovernment), view.

6. William L. Shirer, The Collapse of the Third Republic (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p. 26. See Shirer's footnote 15 for the three French sources cited on this incident.

7. Dominique Pons, Dossier H ...comme Hersant (Paris: Editions Alain Moreau, 1977), p. 14.

8. Ibid., p. 26.

9. Nicolas Brimo, Le Dossier Hersant (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1977), pp. 25-27. This contrasts with Hersant's political activity at the age of sixteen when he and his brother Patrick joined the Popular Front, a socialist party youth group, supporting Blum, a Jew and a liberal socialist politician.

10. "M. Robert Hersant pourrait racheter à M. Paul Winkler la moitié de sa participation à <<France-Soir>>," Le Monde, August 12, 1976, p. 13. Please note that Le Monde, an evening paper, issues its editions carrying the date of the following day. The issue which appeared Wednesday, August 11, carries the date Thursday, August 12.

11. Pierre Albert, La Presse française (Paris: La Documentation française, 1978), p. 100.

12. J. W. Freiberg, The French Press: Class, State, and Ideology (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 72.

13. Le Figaro was founded in 1826.

14. Ibid., p. 74.

15. Jacques Sauvageot, "Presse vendue," Le Monde, August 15, 1976, pp. 1, 12. In a rare departure from policy, the Le Monde even included an editorial cartoon. The paper uses no photographs, but does occasionally use line drawings.

16. "Les commentaires des quotidiens parisiens," Le Monde, August 15, 1976, p. 12.

17. The Times, (London), August 19, 1976, p. 3.

18. "M. Hersant: une prise de participation qui ne menace pas le pluralisme de la presse," Le Monde, August 19, 1976, p. 4.

19. "Les commentaires des quotidiens parisiens," Le Monde, August 19, 1976, p. 4.

20. "La rédaction souhaite obtenir une audience du président de la République," Le Monde, August 19, 1976, p. 4.

21. Pierre Viansson-Ponté, "La part du feu," Le Monde, August 20, 1976, p. 5.

22. "Antenne 2: vers une sorte de dictature sur l'opinion," Le Monde, August 20, 1976, p. 5.

23. Striking workers in France occupy their place of employment rather than forming picket lines to block entry to the building.

24. James F. Clarity, "Outcry Surrounds French Publisher's Bid to Buy Daily," September 6, 1976, p.2.

25. "Les Travailleurs du livre C.G.T. de ‹‹France-Soir››," Le Monde, August 24, 1976, p. 5.

26. Pons, Dossier H ...comme Hersant, p. 222.

27. "Retour de l'Histoire," Le Monde, August 24, 1976, p. 5.

28. Ibid., p. 5.

29. "Le conflit de <<France-Soir>>," Le Monde, August 25, 1976, p. 6.

30. Franz-Olivier Giesbert and Lucien Rioux, "Main basse sur la presse," Le Nouvel Observateur, August 23, 1976, p. 23.

31. "La journée de solidarité," Le Monde, August 27, 1976, p. 10; and "Rally and Work Stoppages Back Strike at France-Soir," The New York Times, August 27, 1976, p. A3.

32. "Outcry Surrounds French Publisher's Bid to Buy Daily," The New York Times, September 6, 1976, p. 2. The August 27 and September 6 New York Times reports on Hersant show interesting differences, with the first correspondent possibly more sympathetic to the journalists, and the second more taken with Hersant.

33. Lalanne, "Hersant, ou la volonté de puissance," p. 133.

34. Ibid., p. 138.

35. Pons, Dossier H ...comme Hersant, p. 271.

36. Pierre Albert, La Presse française, p. 93.

APPENDIX

Le premier empire de presse français : plus de 40 titres, 10 000 salariés.

The first empire of the French press, from "Hersant: le défi," L'Express, January 17, 1986.

Regional printing centers for the Hersant Group, from Nicolas Brimo, Le Dossier Hersant, (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1977).

PRESSE

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Presse vendue

(Suite de la première page.)

La puissance politique et la gloire des salons s'attachent en effet aux géants de la presse. Quand la Librairie Hachette se taille un empire, le découpe, le reconstruit, quand M. Paul Winkler achète *France-Soir* pour satisfaire une ancienne passion et rivaliser avec Pierre Lazareff son modèle, au moins, malgré le poids

(Dessin de PLANTU.)

de l'argent, l'enjeu des regroupements et des dispersions, c'est la presse, ce sont les journaux.

Il s'agit aujourd'hui de tout autre chose et ni plus ni moins que d'une entreprise déterminée de concentration entre les mains d'un homme politique qui, en quelques années, devient le « numéro un » de la presse française. Un titre est-il menacé ? Quel que soit le lieu, quel que soit le sujet, M. Robert Hersant s'en porte acquéreur. Ainsi se dessine une toile d'araignée rationnelle qui comprendra un jour une rédaction intégrée, rédigeant à Paris le premier quotidien du matin et le plus grand quotidien du soir, fournissant l'information nationale à de multiples quotidiens de province, disposant d'un réseau exclusif d'imprimeries disséminées en France. Que pensent les journalistes de cette vaste entreprise ? Sont-ils rassurés lorsqu'on leur dit que leur indépendance n'est nullement menacée ? M. Winkler peut-il sérieusement penser que son encombrant associé à 50 % (on murmure déjà d'autres pourcentages) le laissera diriger *France-Soir* à sa guise ? Qui croira que l'unification politique ne suivra pas inéluctablement l'unification économique ? Qu'en pensent les quotidiens de province, si sûrs de leur invulnérabilité ? Que pensent le gouvernement et le président de la République du poids qu'un seul homme, même s'il appartient à la majorité, sera, est déjà, en mesure d'exercer sur l'opinion ?

Trop, c'est trop. Après *le Figaro*, hélas !, avant *France-Soir*, holà ! Longtemps seul, ou presque, à parler de la presse, *le Monde* se réjouit de voir aujourd'hui son inquiétude largement partagée. S'il faut ne pas se borner à de vaines lamentations, faisons une proposition concrète. Parmi les dispositions bafouées (rien n'est plus offensant que le mépris des lois) de l'ordonnance sur la presse du 26 août 1944, citons l'article 9 : « *La même personne ne peut être directeur ou directeur délégué de plus d'un quotidien.* » La volonté du législateur est ici évidente et il faut la respecter ; elle tend à favoriser ou à imposer le respect du pluralisme. Qu'on ne nous dise pas que la loi est observée lorsque divers employés d'un même groupe de presse accèdent nominalement à la direction des titres. Ce sont alors d'autres dispositions essentielles de la même ordonnance qui sont violées, celle qui fait du propriétaire d'un journal le seul directeur légal, celle qui punit sévèrement la pratique des « prête-noms ». La réaction vigoureuse des journalistes de *France-Soir* n'aura pas été vaine si les quelques jours de délai qu'ils ont arrachés suffisent à réveiller des énergies jusqu'alors assoupies. Il est vrai qu'au milieu du mois d'août...

JACQUES SAUVAGEOT.

Le Monde, which rarely uses any art, used an illustration early in the coverage of the strike. The journalist/ink-well image has a price tag which reads "For Sale."